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HEIDEGGER'S (DIS)ENGAGEMENT WITH ASIAN LANGUAGES

Language is a prominent issue in Martin Heidegger's concern with Asian thought.[1] On a number of occasions, he suggests that language is the most central *topos* for the question of East–West dialogue. In "On the Question of Being," he speaks of "the realm of possible dialogue between (the language of Europe and that of East Asia)," although "neither is able on its own to open or to found this realm."[2] In "A Dialogue on Language—between a Japanese and an Inquirer," he expresses his concern whether what he had been attempting to think of as the nature of language was "also" adequate for the nature of the East Asian languages and whether there could be a nature of language that could ground the opening up of an East–West dialogue.[3] Below is a remark virtually unknown,

> One theme appears to me to be inevitable: Speech and Writing; here become evident the essential questions of East–West dialogue; questions of signification and image in the widest sense can be brought into the open.[4]

This remark appeared in a letter dated April 6, 1955. It was addressed to Emil Pretorius, President of the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts, who had invited Heidegger to give a lecture in a series entitled "Of Language."

It seems that Heidegger has seriously thought about relevant issues connected with Asian languages. However, disparate strands of considerations are entangled together in his claims. On the one hand, he suggests that there is a radical inaccessibility of these languages. This seems to be an incontrovertible reason for him to disengage himself from Asian thought. On the other hand, he makes inquires about words from these languages that might correspond to some of his key notions important for his project of reenacting the other beginning of Western philosophy. These signs and gestures point to reverse directions and entail apparently irreconcilable implications.

The purpose of this article is to provide a balanced and convincing account of Heidegger's dis(engagement) with Asian languages. It

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begins by examining Heidegger's fleeting remarks bearing upon East Asian languages, several of which are scattered in a number of texts published in German and have rarely been brought into discussion. Then I investigate two prominent cases where Heidegger attends to words from Asian languages: One is his inquiry about Sanskrit words in 1960, the other is the discussion about the Japanese words for art at the colloquium "Art and Thinking" held on May 18, 1958 in Freiburg. These two episodes, especially Heidegger's direct contact with Indian thought, have gone almost unnoticed.

I. An Ontological Barrier

In a letter dated June 30, 1955 to Medard Boss, a Swiss psychiatrist, Heidegger observes,

> Today I am amazed that years ago I dared to give the lecture on language. The greatest omission belongs to the fact that the possibility for a *sufficient* [*zureichenden*] discussion about the East Asian languages is *lacking* [*fehlt*].[5]

Heidegger seems to regret that, when he delivered the lecture on language, it was not possible to discuss East Asian languages.[6] He calls this the "greatest omission." What is bewildering is that, if Heidegger considers that a "sufficient" discussion of East Asian languages is of primal importance, why he did not commit himself to obtaining as much knowledge as possible about these languages. This seems to be a rather naïve question. A ready answer is that these languages are so formidably difficult that most Western philosophers cannot gain access to them. This is what Heidegger sometimes mentions. In a letter of June 20, 1966 to Matsuo Keikichi, a Japanese translator of *Being and Time*,[7] he remarks,

> Because we Europeans usually fail to have a command of the Japanese language, unfortunately the necessary mutual understanding comes from one side only.[8]

Here Heidegger appears to be commenting on the empirical fact that most Europeans do not have a command of the Japanese language, and thus understanding between Europeans and Japanese is inevitably unilateral. He may well have in view the fact that numerous Japanese scholars consider their own tradition from the perspective of Western conceptual systems.[9] Therefore, their own understanding of Japanese tradition could also be said to be unilateral.

In his letter to the organizers of the symposium "Heidegger and Eastern Thought" held in Honolulu on November 17–21, 1969, Heidegger again shows regret at the lack of the command of Eastern languages,

> Again and again it has seemed urgent to me that a dialogue take place with the thinkers of what is to us the Eastern world. The greatest difficulty in this enterprise always lies, as far as I can see, in the fact that with few exceptions there is no command of the Eastern languages either in Europe or in the United States. . . . May your conference prove fruitful in spite of this precarious [*mißlichen*] circumstance.[10]

Heidegger attributes the "greatest difficulty" of an East–West dialogue to the lack of command of Eastern languages in the West. However, Heidegger's statement is somewhat out of place, because most participants of this conference were at home with both Asian and European languages. Heidegger should have been aware of this fact. Therefore, his stress upon the inaccessibility of East Asian languages must be more than an empirical observation.

Before elaborating this point, I would like to supplement the background of Heidegger's letter. A large part of this letter was read out in the introduction address by Winfield E. Nagley, one of the organizers, and published in the first piece of the special issue of *Philosophy East and West*, entitled "Introduction to the Symposium and Reading of a Letter from Martin Heidegger."[11] However, the full text of Heidegger's letter, dated July 4, 1969, became available only in the year 2000 when it was printed in volume 16 of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*. In fact, the last paragraph of his letter was omitted in what was published in *Philosophy East and West*. Probably, Nagley did not read it out to the conference participants either. In the last paragraph of his letter, Heidegger states,

> Now in regard to the words of welcome and introduction for which you ask, I have to appeal to your kindness to excuse me for not honouring your request. From all sides I am receiving requests of this kind so that I have to refuse every one of them in order not to offend somebody.[12]

Heidegger declined the invitation to write "the words of welcome and introduction" for this conference. Probably because of this refusal, Heidegger was contacted again. In another letter dated October 29, 1969 to Borgmann, another organizer, Heidegger gave him permission to read out his previous letter at the conference and to print it as a message of "special greetings and thanks to the participants of the conference."[13] Nagley did not mention the second letter. It remains unknown whether this letter had already reached Nagley when he gave his speech on November 17.

Another striking remark on the inaccessibility of East Asian languages is made during Heidegger's conversation with Hellmuth Hecker on August 30, 1952. Hecker was professor of philosophy at the University of Hamburg and an important German scholar of Zen

Buddhism. He recounted this conversation from memory in "A Walk with Heidegger," which was printed as an appendix of Willfred Hartig's monograph *The Teaching of Buddha and Heidegger: Contribution to East-West Dialogue of the Thinking in the Twentieth Century*. An exchange in their conversation runs as follows:

> Hecker: An important question: Have you engaged yourself with Eastern, that is, Indian and Chinese philosophy?
>
> Heidegger: Hardly. The linguistic difficulties with the translations are insurmountable. I know what the difficulties are already with Greek; one has to start when young to penetrate in this language. To the Chinese and Japanese world I simply have no access. *Sein und Zeit* has been translated into Japanese, but about the "how" I cannot judge. With our logistic-grammatical conceptual apparatus there are many words [when translating] that we cannot grasp sharply. For example when I read the translations from Chinese by Richard Wilhelm, I see that he has approached the text completely in the framework of Kantian philosophy.[14]

That one has to start early to learn a difficult foreign language is a trivial empirical truism. However, this is not Heidegger's last word. In reiterating linguistic difficulty and the lack of access to East Asian languages, he invokes a nontrivial reason for it. That is, the logistic framework of Western languages.

Certainly, Heidegger has access to Richard Wilhelm's translation of the *Daodejing* and of the *Zhuangzi*.[15] In Heidegger's eyes, Wilhelm has read Kantian ideas into Laozi's verses.[16] In the following passage, quite probably Heidegger is thinking of Wilhelm when he speaks of Laozi being made into a Kantian. In another place, Heidegger writes,

> [T]he λόγος-character of Western thought demands from us that if we should dare to touch these alien worlds, we must first ask ourselves whether we are capable at all of hearing that which was thought there. This question becomes even more urgent, because European thinking is threatening to become planetary [*planetarisch*], in that contemporary Indians, Chinese and Japanese can usually bring to us what is experienced by them only through our European way of thinking. Thus from there and from here everything is stirred around in an enormous hodge-podge, in which one cannot distinguish any more whether the ancient Indians were English empiricists and Laotse a Kantian.[17]

This excerpt comes from the lecture series "Principles of Thinking" which Heidegger delivered in 1957, where he shows concern about the "planetarization" of the world in relation to those "alien worlds." It is clear that the inaccessibility of Asian languages is not simply due to the fact that few Europeans enjoy mastery of these languages, but more fundamentally due to the logistic framework of Western

thinking. The dualistic metaphysical system has prevented European people from being able to hear what was thought in the old traditions of India, China, and Japan.

It must be noted that, for Heidegger, the awareness of linguistic restriction *itself* does not arise from outside of Western thinking. On the contrary, to consider the question whether "we are capable at all of hearing that which was thought there" is a demand made by the λόγος character of Western thinking itself! Whenever European scholars should dare to touch those alien worlds, they need first ask themselves this question. Both the failure of the capacity to comprehend Asian thought and the demand for an awareness of this, come from the same source, the Western tradition itself.

Furthermore, the practice of making a Kantian out of Laozi cannot be attributed only to Wilhelm in particular and to Western Sinologists in general; contemporary Asian intellectuals are not exempt from it. Heidegger draws attention to the fact that European way of thinking is becoming "planetary." This implies that the mode of experience and thinking of contemporary Asian scholars is under strong European influences. Therefore, their representation of Asian traditions is not pure and authentic. The dominance of European framework of thinking leads to incautious identification or assimilation of Asian and European thought, such that Indian thinkers are described in analogy with English empiricists, and Laozi is represented as a Kantian. All this chaos is generated by the planetarization of European thinking.

In *Time and Being*, Heidegger articulates similar considerations. He states,

> Being as presencing in the sense of calculable material [. . .] claims all the inhabitants of the earth in a uniform manner without the inhabitants of the non-European continents explicitly knowing this or even being able or wanting to know of the origin of this determination of Being.[18]

For Heidegger, Being as presencing is essentially interrelated with the metaphysical mode of representation of European languages. Those people in the non-European continents are not excluded from the planetary expansion of this mode of determination of Being, even if they are not aware of this, or have no intention to know anything about its origin. Not only European people have no access to Asian thought, but also that Asian people themselves, dominated by the planetary European mode of thinking, have no access to their own traditions.

Now we are in a better position to understand Heidegger's complaint in his conversation with Hecker, "*Sein und Zeit* has been translated into Japanese, but about the 'how' I cannot judge." As Heidegger's lifelong friend Petzet records, in a conversation in his last

years with a German scholar, Heidegger expressed skepticism about "what his Japanese friends made out of his philosophy," and said that he "has difficulty believing blindly that thoughts in a language so foreign would mean the same."[19] These utterances seem to entail a relativism regarding the reverse side, that is, while European people have no access to Asian languages, Asian people (in this case, Japanese scholars) may not be able to gain adequate understanding of European thought because of linguistic barriers. However, with a view to what has been discussed in the foregoing, underlying Heidegger's comment on the Japanese translation of his work is something more complicated. He seems to suggest that, because of the domination of European metaphysical dualistic framework of thinking over the Japanese mind, Japanese scholars may not be able to receive and convey the message from *Being and Time*.

Inasmuch as European ways of thinking as determined by the logos character of their languages have become planetary, inasmuch as neither European nor Asian people have access to ancient Asian traditions, Heidegger describes the circumstances as "precarious" in his letter to the organizer of the Hawaii conference. The only way out of the dilemma where access to Asian traditions is lacking lies in an engagement with the inceptual thinking of Greek thinkers and their language in the first place. As Heidegger states in his lecture "Science and Reflection" delivered in August 1954, "a dialogue with the Greek thinkers and their language [. . .] remains for us the precondition of the inevitable dialogue with the East Asian world."[20]

The precondition for engaging with Asian languages is a dialogue with Greek thinkers. This is because the origin of Western metaphysical tradition resides in the first beginning initiated by Greek thinking and its language; at the same time, a possibility for reversal is also opened up. As Heidegger stresses on various occasions, only through the renewal of Western tradition itself can there be a possibility for a new beginning of thinking.[21] In "The Principle of Identity," Heidegger writes,

> Our Western languages are in different ways languages of metaphysical thinking. It must remain an open question whether the nature of Western languages is in itself marked with the exclusive brand of metaphysics, and thus marked permanently by onto-theo-logic, or whether these languages offer other possibilities of saying—and that means at the same time a telling unsaying [*sagenden Nichsagens*].[22]

Despite occasional criticism of Western languages, Heidegger has the conviction that only through these languages could one find possibilities for a true Saying. The other beginning of thinking is impossible without what is already present in what is said in the first beginning.

In opposing himself against what is today called Orientalist practice of selecting intellectual sources from Eastern tradition according to European interests and presenting them in conformity with European conceptual systems, Heidegger seems to presuppose the existence of pure ancient traditions uncontaminated by Western binary metaphysical framework of representation. In a letter to Hellmuth Hecker on February 16, 1955, Heidegger writes,

> That Buddhism and not less so Chinese and Japanese thought need a completely different interpretation, which is free from eighteenth and nineteenth century images, needs no further elucidation given my concerns about classic philosophy. However I miss the presuppositions for both.[23]

Now the question is, how to evaluate this anti-Orientalist practice? What differentiates Heidegger from an anti-Orientalist is: For an anti-Orientalist, viewing things from the East in a limited European perspective manifests colonialist consciousness. Whether the Europeans are world-historically doomed to resort to the Orientalist perspective remains unconsidered. In general, an anti-Orientalist thinks that with proper hindsight, it is possible and necessary to transcend colonialist consciousness and understand other cultures in their own right. For Heidegger, it is not by accident, but world-historically out of the evolvement of the history of Being, that the Orientalist attitude toward Asian traditions, for this matter, arises. Furthermore, because metaphysical thinking has become planetary, not only European people but also contemporary Asian people are subject to what is normally called Orientalist approach to their own tradition.

Sometimes Heidegger hints that the empirical/ontological time will come when finally Eastern thought can be revealed in its authenticity to Western people. For example, in the same conversation with Hecker on August 30, 1952, there is the following exchange:

> Hecker: Surely, one can find important matters in oriental philosophy.
>
> Heidegger: Certainly, but we have to develop the questions from (out of) our Western thinking. First our philosophy up to now has to become question-able. For the process of the encounter between West and East I estimate 300 years [would be needed].[24]

In insisting that a transformation has to be enacted from within Western thinking, Heidegger seems to have offered a crude un-Heideggerian estimation about the time span when the East becomes available and hence there could be a genuine East–West encounter. However, according to the structure of his account of temporality, what is to come is always yet to come; as a thinker always remains on the way. Since it is indeterminate when the transformation

of the Western tradition will be accomplished, it is also indeterminate when the time will come when European people can ultimately have access to non-Western sources. In this light, the presumption concerning the existence of these sources that are uncontaminated by the logos character of Western thinking remains extremely vague and vacuous. In spite of all these problematics involved in Heidegger's general reflection on Asian languages, on various occasions he does encounter concrete texts and words from Asian traditions. This is examined in the subsequent sections.

II. Encounter with the Sanskrit Language

Despite the amount of comparative studies of Heidegger's philosophy in relation to Indian tradition, there are very few references to Indian thought or language in his published works. In 1952, Heidegger mentioned Indian philosophy once, but only to point out that, together with Chinese philosophy, it is not philosophy.[25] In a lecture of 1957, he pointed to the situation where "the ancient Indians" were presented as English empiricists.[26] In his commentary on Hölderlin's poems, he uses such phrases as "depths of Asia," "the Indies," "the rivers of the Indians and the Greeks."[27] According to Jarava Lal Mehta, a prominent phenomenologist of Indian origin, a partial explanation for the scarcity of Heidegger's references to Indian thought is his critical attitude toward neo-Kantian presuppositions with which most of his older contemporaries approached Eastern thought; in addition, Sanskrit is an Indo-European language and so also involves a subject–object structure that induces metaphysical thinking.[28]

Because of his contact with Medard Boss, a Swiss psychiatrist, Heidegger develops a serious interest in Indian philosophy and the Sanskrit language. Boss used Heidegger's philosophy to construct his own theory of medicine and psychiatry, which he called *Daseinsanalytik* as distinguished from psychoanalysis. He also took a strong interest in Indian thought. During his two trips to India, he underwent apprenticeship with a guru in Kashmir associated with the line of Kashmiri Shaivism. His theory about dream is obviously influenced by Indian ideas.[29]

Boss' friendship with Heidegger started through correspondence in 1947, while Heidegger was still in difficult situation. By the time of his death, Heidegger had sent Boss 256 letters and fifty greeting cards. From 1959 to the end of the 1960s, at Boss's invitation, Heidegger gave regular seminars to fifty to seventy psychiatrists or psychiatry students on a regular basis. Boss recorded these seminars as well as his conversations with Heidegger in *Zollikoner Seminare, Protokolle—Gespräche—Briefe Herausgegeben von Medard Boss*. In this collec-

tion, Boss also includes edited versions of Heidegger's handwritten drafts for the seminars and letters addressed to him.[30]

In a letter on November 9, 1959, Heidegger admits, "the talk about India [with Boss] showed me that my attempts do not remain totally isolated."[31] Quite probably, Boss had drew Heidegger's attention to affinities between his thinking and Indian philosophy. In another letter to Boss on March 7, 1960, Heidegger asked him to find out and share with him Sanskrit words for "ontological difference," that is, as he explained, for "being" (*Sein*) and "beings" (*Seiendes*), and for "unconcealedness" (*Unverborgenheit*) and "forgetfulness" (*Vergessenheit*).[32] On March 12, Boss contacted his colleague and former student Erna M. Hoch, who was working in India. In this letter, Boss mentioned that a few weeks before he wrote to Professor Kanti Chandra Pandey of Lucknow University, a Sanskrit scholar and a philosopher, to inquire about the Sanskrit equivalents of these terms; but he failed to receive a reply. In this circumstance, he asked Hoch, who had visited Pandey previously, to make a face-to-face inquiry. According to the closeness of the dates of Heidegger and Boss's letters, it seems that Heidegger had already asked about the Sanskrit words before March 7, 1960. The letter on March 7, 1960 may well be a reminder of his special assignment.

Erna M. Hoch worked as a psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and doctor in various capacities and locations in India from 1956 to 1988. She seeks to integrate Western conceptions of psychiatry under the influence of Heidegger's Dasein-analysis with sources from Indian tradition. The Indian philosopher Pandey was a representative of the Kashmiri Shaivism. His major work includes a monumental book on Abhīnavagupta (tenth–eleventh century), the main exponent of this school of Shaivism, commentaries on Abhīnavagupta's main treatises, and a book on Western aesthetics.[33]

The first time when Hoch discussed her special mission was on the occasion of Boss's eightieth birthday in October, 1983. She wrote an article in German on the basis of her notes in English typescript of 1960. This article was published in the journal *Daseinsanalyse* in 1985.[34] The English version of Hoch's report entitled "Messenger between East and West" is included in her book entitled *Sources and Resources. A Western Psychiatrist's Search for Meaning in the Ancient Indian Scriptures*.[35] In his letter to Hoch, Boss wrote:

> These days, when Heidegger comes to stay with me, he shows more and more interest in Indian thought. He regrets in particular that he has no knowledge of Sanskrit. He now has asked me to inquire what would be the Sanskrit of some fundamental terms and concepts. Above all, he wishes to know whether the Sanskrit language can distinguish between Being and beings.[36]

Boss made a few preliminary suggestions about these words and reminded Hoch, for his own sake and for that of Heidegger, to pay attention to exploring the meaning of those words right down to the connotations of the Sanskrit word-roots.[37] Hoch visited Pandey on March 20, 1960 and reported back to Boss. On receiving Boss' reply on April 10, with a lengthy list of detailed questions regarding her notes of conversation with Pandey, Hoch again visited Pandey on May 15.

According to Hoch's record, there are two different roots for being in the sense of the mode of being of individual beings: One is √*as* from which forms in the present tense can be derived, such as *sat*, *sattā*. It expresses the fact of being as such. Another is √*bhū* from which can be derived verbal forms pertaining to the past and future, such as *bhāvana*. It indicates change, transformation, and development. The suffix *tā*, meaning "capacity, power, possibility," is normally added to nouns and adjectives to form abstract nouns; *sattā*, being a noun, means the "possibility or power to be, being capable of being everything." The Sanskrit words for the highest Being is *Mahāsattā* (*mahā* means "great, big"), which literally means "the absolute possibility of being." It is infinite, unlimited, and unchanging. On the basis of these inquiries, Hoch concluded that Sanskrit gives expression to what Heidegger calls the ontological difference.[38] The words for "concealedness" and "unconcealedness" are *āvṛtatva* and *anāvṛtatva* respectively. The root of these words is √*vṛ*, or √*vaṛ*, the original condition. Hoch commented that Indian philosophy knows these notions as well; however, it is difficult to establish relations of congruence with Heidegger's thought.[39]

Because of limitation of space, I cannot engage in a detailed presentation and examination of Hoch's report. Mehta once offers an illuminating discussion of three Sanskrit words for being: the verb *asti* (derived from the root √*as*), the abstract noun *sattā*, and *bhāva* (derived from the root √*bhū*). He also mentions *sat* as the more commonly seen word for being. [40] Mehta's account is very similar to Hoch's report.

In a letter on May 22, 1960, Boss told Hoch that Heidegger was "extremely impressed" by the Indian view of Being and truth; yet, there is nothing more bearing on the philosopher's response than that remark.[41] Instead, Boss turned to his own view. According to him, these inquiries reveal "the decisive difference" between ancient Indian thought and Heidegger's philosophy. This difference resides in the "fundamentally different thinking about the role of 'human being' within the total 'event' of 'Being.' "[42] We will see this point again in a short while.

In view of the richness of Hoch's report, which was most probably transferred to Heidegger, it is somewhat surprising that neither in his

writing nor in his speech Heidegger has never commented on the Sanskrit words he learned in this connection. In the seminar on Heraclitus held together with Eugen Fink in 1966–1967, when discussing the nature of sleep in connection with Fragment 26 of Heraclitus, Heidegger commented, "For Indians the state of sleep is the supreme life."[43] This remark must have come from his acquaintance with Indian thought through Boss and Hoch. Included in the latter's report are discussions of the state of deep sleep.[44]

On a few occasions in his discussion with Boss, Heidegger stresses that there is a fundamental difference between his philosophy and Eastern thought. In one of their conversations in the period April 24–May 4, 1963, during their vacation together in Taormina, Sicily, when Heidegger was talking about Being and Dasein, Boss spoke of how Indians would think about these issues, "Indian thought does not require a guardian for the clearing. There is clearing in and for itself."[45] Boss rightly saw that with Indians the human being does not assume such an important role as Heidegger ascribes, that is, as a guardian of Being. Heidegger concurred,

> In contrast, it is very important to me that the human being is a *human* being. In Indian thought, the point is "a giving up of being human" in the sense of Da-sein's self-transformation into the pure luminosity [of Being].[46]

Heidegger put his finger on the right point. The role of human beings is indeed conceived very differently in Western and Eastern traditions. After Heidegger's lengthy explication of his thoughts, Boss asked him in what ways his conception of the matter of Being was more adequate than Indian thought, which, Boss repeated, does not need a guardian of clearedness. Heidegger responded:

> My conception is more adequate, insofar as I am proceeding from Da-sein and from [its] understanding of being, and insofar as I limit myself to what *can be experienced immediately*. Thus, I do not need assert anything about clearedness itself. [. . .] Above all, the above quoted Indian insight cannot be assimilated into my thinking.[47]

In spite of Heidegger's interest in Sanskrit words corresponding to his key notions such as Being and beings, and unconcealedness, he knew very well the important difference between his philosophy and Indian ideas and insisted that his conception is more adequate. A staunch defender for Heidegger's special bond with the Chinese *dao* would possibly takes as trivial his statement that the relevant *Indian* insight cannot be assimilated into his thinking. However, it is notable that Chinese Daoist thinking is also opposed to granting the human being the most supreme status and to setting up an abysmal gap between the human being and other beings. Therefore,

Heidegger's disclaimer can very well be extended to Chinese Daoist thinking.

In response to Heidegger's claim, Boss cited the Indian insight that not only the essence of the human being but also the essence of all other beings belong immediately to the clearedness in itself. Heidegger reiterated the fundamental difference between humans and other beings with reference to the criterion of whether or not possessing language. He explained that *hellen* (to clear) occurs originally as *hallen* (to resound), as tone, and stressed that all other beings fall short of this grounding tone. Following this, Heidegger concluded their conversation by a rhetorical question: "How close this is to Indian insights into ultimate truths is best shown by my assertion: 'Language is the house of being'?"[48]

Heidegger's stress on the centrality of language is in a way a corollary of his emphasis on the unique status of the human being. This idea is lacking in the majority of Asian traditions. As Elmar Weinmayr points out, in Japanese thinking, language is regarded as one practice among others. He calls this view lococentrism. In contrast, logocentrism is essential to European languages, according to which language is regarded as the "one site of truth," and is separated from other practices.[49]

III. Is There a Japanese Word for Art?

Apart from "A Dialogue on Language," another major event of Heidegger's involvement with Japanese language is a colloquium on the theme "Art and Thinking" that he co-held with Hisamatsu Shinichi in Freiburg on May 18, 1958. Hisamatsu (1889–1980) is a well-known Zen Buddhist and university professor. In 1957 and 1958, He traveled around the world, delivering lectures in the United States (including one together with Suzuki Daisetz Teitaro at Harvard University). During his stay in Europe, he met Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, Paul Bultmann, and Carl G. Jung. Hisamatsu met Heidegger in Vienna where the latter presented his lecture "Poetry and Thinking" on May 11, 1958. When they met again in Freiburg, they held the colloquium on art and thinking. This meeting has rarely been discussed. Through its investigation, we can obtain a clear picture of Heidegger's attitude toward Asian languages.

The participants of the colloquium included Hermann Gundert, Max Müller, and Siegfried Bröse (these three from University of Freiburg), Egon Vietta (from University of Darmstadt), Alfred L. Copley, and another unidentified person referred to as Y. A record of this colloquium with the focus on Heidegger's contribution can be

found in *Japan und Heidegger*.[50] The more detailed proceedings were edited by Copley and published in a slim trilingual version (English, German, and Japanese) entitled *Listening to Heidegger and Hisamatsu*, with a few pieces of Copley's Zen-style artwork.[51]

Heidegger opened the colloquium by remarking, "We would like to, from our European standpoint, make an attempt to grasp certain characteristics of the nature [*Wesenszüge*] of art."[52] After claiming that whether art still occupies a place in this age is a pressing question, he presented the opening question: "how that, which we call East Asian art, is understood in itself?" As will be seen below, Heidegger's concern is with ancient (or at least pre-modern) Asian art that are not affected by Western influences. Heidegger probed further,

> In concrete terms we shall ask, keeping in mind the great variety within the East Asian world, whether it is at all possible to speak of art and art work in our sense [*Sinn*] of the word. Do you have a name [*Name*] for art in Japan? [53]

Heidegger seemed to be challenging the legitimacy of applying the terms art and artwork, which are of Western origin, to East Asian art; he urges for excavating characteristics of East Asian art as distinct from Western transplantations. However, his focus swiftly moved to the question whether there is a word in Japanese language that corresponds to the Western word "art."

Contesting Heidegger's line of thought, Gundert suggested a reversal of Heidegger's way of questioning. With this reversal, what are taken to be art and artwork in the West are not the starting point. Instead, one considers whether objects or phenomena treated as art in the West would be acceptable from the perspective of East Asian people. Gundert added that this is a matter of frequent disputation in Japan. To this proposal that comes near to breaking through the confines of Eurocentrism, Heidegger responded,

> To answer that question one would have to question the notion of art radically. We confine ourselves here to the preliminaries [*ein vorläufiges*]. Is there a Japanese word for what we call art?

Heidegger's way of inquiring about Japanese words is strikingly similar to that in "A Dialogue on Language."

> Inquirer: I shall permit myself for the moment to put to you an altogether preliminary [*durchaus vorläufige*] question: What does the Japanese world understand by language? Asked still more cautiously: Do you have in your language a word for what we call language? If not, how do you experience what with us is called language?[54]

During his meeting with Tezuka Tomio (the prototypical figure for the Japanese interlocutor in "A Dialogue") in 1953, one of Heidegger's

questions is framed in exactly the same way: "Which words in Japanese are the customary terms for appearance [*Erscheinung*] and essence [*Wesen*]?"[55]

Despite Heidegger's quasi-anti-Orientalist gestures as shown toward the end of the first section of this article, he insists that one should pursue questioning from within the "European standpoint," which he presented as the general framework of questioning for the colloquium on art and thinking.[56] Presumably, because of his concern with the status of art in contemporary Europe, he would like to have an idea how what is called art is understood in East Asia.

To Heidegger's repeated question, Hisamatsu replies that the Japanese word for art is *geijiz* (that is, *geijutsu*) (げいじゅつ) (芸術). This is a compound word: *Gei* (げい) (芸) originally means capacity (*Können*) and skillfulness (*Kunstfertigkeit*). At the end of the nineteenth century, this compound word *geijiz* (*geijutsu*) was coined as a translation, or interpretation (*Wiedergabe*), of Western aesthetic concept of art. The Japanese have adopted Western notions and translated them using words taken from their own tradition. Concerned with the pre-modern form and the original experience of art, Heidegger interrogates searchingly,

> What preceded these adaptations? Was it a picture they saw in a work of art? Which was their original experience of art before the adoption of European concepts? This is the interesting point.[57]

Heidegger seems to be very earnest in finding out the primitive word that is occluded from modern European influences. In response, Hisamatsu cites an older word for art, *geidō* (げいどう) (芸道). Literally, *geidō* means the way of *gei*; *dō* (どう) (道) is equivalent to the Chinese word *dao*. As Hisamatsu explains, *dō* has the connotation of way, or method. It also refers to nature and life.

Heidegger's phrase "our sense of the word [art]" has to be taken with caution. It is well known that Heidegger opposes himself against metaphysical conception of art that involves a subject–object relation, and proposes a view of art as what shelters truth, as "the letting happen of the advent of the truth of beings."[58] In order to overcome metaphysical conception of art, he is motivated to know how art is understood in the old Asian traditions, where, as he must have often been informed by his numerous Japanese visitors, is absent dualistic metaphysical framework of representation. In these traditions, he may be able to find ideas about art that are distinct from metaphysical conceptions, and at the same time suit well his innovative notion of art, or lend an aid to his philosophizing. For example, as Heidegger mentioned in the same colloquium, East Asian art sees representation as a hindrance that will be removed once one has reached the source.

Also, the picture is neither a symbol nor visual imagery; rather, in painting or writing one sets in motion the movement toward the self.

In spite of all these considerations, it is Heidegger's deep-seated belief that, fundamentally speaking, overcoming metaphysics can only be achieved from within Western philosophical tradition itself, and a genuine questioning of a tradition can only come from within. Therefore, any inquiry about non-Western sources has to start from the European standpoint. To turn the inquiry the other way around, to set as the aim an examination how East Asian people would think of what is taken to be art in the West (as Gundert suggested), for Heidegger, would lead to subjecting the whole of Western tradition to external questioning, that is, from the standpoint of East Asia.

This is why Heidegger insisted that the participants keep to what he calls the preliminaries by asking whether there is a word in Japanese for what is called art in Europe. It could be said that Heidegger's philosophical enterprise remains to be immanent in that radical questioning is always to be evaded. He is not ready to subject existing key notions and themes from Western tradition to external challenges. This holds true even when Heidegger made two favorable remarks about East Asian art in the same colloquium: One is, "what we have been searching for so far, is already in place in Japan—the Japanese actually have it."[59]

This remark reminds one of a less-known record of Heidegger's encounter with the Chinese language. During a meeting with Chang Chung-yuan on August 18, 1972, with reference to the idea of identity of language with Being, Heidegger asked him whether this also occurs in the ancient Chinese language. He also asks Chang how to say "this is a tree" and "this is an old tree" in Chinese. Using expressions steeped in Heidegger's thought, Chang responded that the latter expression showed that the being of the speaker and his utterance are totally identified, or alternatively speaking, "belong together."[60]

Heidegger seems to be wondering about whether ancient Chinese language and Japanese art manifest certain features that he had been trying to articulate. However, one must keep in mind his insistence on pursuing any inquiry from the European standpoint. Another favorable remark is made in concluding the colloquium:

> It has become clear that we, with our preconceived ideas, namely, the conception of art as following a direct and steady path, cannot arrive at the point the Japanese have already reached.[61]

This remark is consistent with Heidegger's general attitude toward Asian languages: Contemporary (European) thinking is not yet in a position to confront what is present in Japanese thinking. A genuine understanding of Asian traditions can only be possible after the West

has renewed its tradition in the indeterminate future. Before that, Asian language and thought is inaccessible because of an essential linguistic barrier, or, alternatively speaking, because the Europeans have not yet acquired the eye for pursuing these advanced, instead of "preliminary" questions.

IV. Conclusion

How to render intelligible the seemingly irreconcilable suggestions and implications of Heidegger's comportment toward Asian languages? Why does he insist on highlighting the fact that he has no access to these languages while sporadically engaging with these alien languages, such as requesting information about the Japanese word for art and about counterpart Sanskrit words for some of his key philosophical terms? Notwithstanding the latter, Heidegger has always held to his fundamental tenets and orientation of thinking, that is, a reversal of the current situation, where Western dualistic metaphysical thinking has become planetary and ancient Asian inheritance remains inaccessible to both European and contemporary Asian intellectuals. This reversal or the "other beginning" can only be achieved from the very origin that gives rise to these "precarious" circumstances. In other words, the most urgent task is for Western philosophical tradition to transform itself from within, to reconfigure what was said in the first beginning with Greek thinkers and their language. Because of this historical necessity, the statement that anything "authentically" Asiatic is inaccessible is not a factual observation, but of normative nature. The project of reversal has to proceed without any genuine challenge from the Asiatic.

Heidegger may have assimilated a few specific words and verses from Asian intellectual sources into some of his writings, and, insofar as this aspect is concerned, he could be called a minimalist "intercultural" thinker in a carefully qualified sense. On a positive note, it could also be said that he initiates a style of reading Asian classics and of interpreting Asian ideas analogous to his approach to Western classical thinkers. However, Heidegger's interest in Asian words and verses is limited to the practice of finding support for his own preconceived ideas. Throughout all his inquiries about Asian words and encounter with Asian sources, Heidegger has never thought of modifying his central ideas in light of the insight from other traditions, for example, the idea that language is central for the notions of clearing and thinking, or the idea that the human being assumes an indispensable role as the guardian of Being. Because of the "preliminary" character of his queries, because of his insistence that those queries be

made from a European perspective, requesting certain items of information about Asian languages neither conflict with nor detract from the central thrust of his *Denkweg*.

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Endnotes

1. Because of the limit of space, I have removed from the original version of this article my discussion of Heidegger's attempt at translating some chapters from the *Daodejing* with the help of Hsiao Shih-yi in the summer of 1946. Interested readers are referred to Lin Ma, *Heidegger on East-West Dialogue: Anticipating the Event* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 153–57.
2. Martin Heidegger, "Zur Seinsfrage," in *Wegmarken*, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), 385–426, 424. Henceforth, GA followed by volume number.
3. Martin Heidegger, "Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache: Zwischen einem Japaner und einem Fragenden," in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Stuttgart: Neske, 1959), 85–156, esp. 93–94.
4. Cited in Samuel IJsseling, "Speech and Writing in Heidegger's Philosophy," in *Phenomenology and Indian Philosophy*, eds. D. P. Chattopadhyaya et al. (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1992), 318–31, esp. 318–19. According to IJsseling, this letter comes from an unknown private collection.
5. Martin Heidegger, *Zollikoner Seminare, Protokolle—Gespräche—Briefe Herausgegeben von Medard Boss*) (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987), 316; emphasis original. *Zollikon Seminars. Protocolls-Conversations-Letters*, trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), 251.
6. Presumably, the lecture referred to is "Language" (delivered in 1950): "Die Sprache," in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Stuttgart: Neske, 1959), 9–34.
7. Martin Heidegger, *Sonzai to Jikan*, trans. Keikichi Matsuo (Tōkyō: Keisōshobō-Verlag, 1960); 2nd ed. in 1966; 3rd ed., with a letter from Heidegger, in 1969; 4th ed. in 1973, 5th ed. in 1977.
8. Martin Heidegger, "Ein Brief von Martin Heidegger an Keikichi Matsuo," in Hartmut Buchner, *Japan und Heidegger. Gedenkschrift der Stadt Messkirch zum hundertsten Geburtstag Martin Heideggers* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1989), 228. In this article, English translations from German texts without existing English versions are mine.
9. For example, in "A Dialogue on Language," Japanese intellectuals are described as "chas[ing] after European conceptual systems" (Heidegger, "Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache," 87).
10. Martin Heidegger, "Gruss und Dank an die Teilnehmer der Heidegger-Konferenz in Honolulu auf Hawai [*sic*]," November 17–21, 1969 (Briefe an Prof. A. Borgmann)," in *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges 1910–1976* (GA 16), 721–22.
11. Winfield E. Nagley, "Introduction to the Symposium and Reading of a Letter from Martin Heidegger," *Philosophy East and West* 20, no. 3 (1970): 221–22.
12. Heidegger, "Gruss und Dank an die Teilnehmer der Heidegger-Konferenz in Honolulu auf Hawai [*sic*]," 721–22.
13. Ibid., 722.
14. Hellmuth Hecker, "Ein Spaziergang mit Heidegger," in Willfred Hartig, *Die Lehre des Buddha und Heidegger: Beiträge zum Ost-West-Dialog des Denkens im 20. Jahrhundert* (Konstanz: Universität Konstanz, 1997), 268–70, esp. 269.
15. Richard Wilhelm, *Laotse Tao Te King: Das Buch des Alten vom Sinn und Leben* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1911); *Dschuang Dsï. Das wahre Buch vom südlichen Blütenland* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1923). Wilhelm was a protestant minister and missionary to China.

16. By present academic standard, it may be said in addition that Wilhelm's translation suffers from "theologoumena." For example, he chose *Sinn* to translate *dao*, alluding to the beginning of *St. John's Gospel* where *logos* had often been translated as *Sinn*.
17. Martin Heidegger, *Grundsätze des Denkens. Freiburger Vorträge 1957*, in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* (GA 79, 1994, 79–176), 145.
18. Martin Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denken* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969), 7.
19. Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger 1929–1976*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 167.
20. Martin Heidegger, "Wissenschaft und Besinnung," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (GA 7, 2000), 37–66, esp. 41.
21. Cf. "Spiegel Gespräch mit Martin Heidegger," in Martin Heidegger, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges 1910–1976* (GA 16, 2000, 652–83).
22. Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference* (bilingual edition), trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 73; *Identität und Differenz*, 142; translation modified.
23. Cited in Hellmuth Hecker, "Heidegger und Schopenhauer," *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch* 71(1990): 86–96, 91.
24. Hecker, "Ein Spaziergang mit Heidegger," 269.
25. Martin Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997), 228.
26. See the first section of this article.
27. Martin Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, GA 4, 140, 81, 83, respectively.
28. Jarava Lal Mehta, "Heidegger and Vedānta: Reflections on a Questionable Theme," in *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987), 15–45.
29. Boss' experience in India as a psychiatrist is recorded in his book *Indienfahrt eines Psychiaters* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959; 4th ed., Bern-Stuttgart-Toronto: Verlag Hans Huber, 1987).
30. As Heidegger had planned the *Zollikon Seminars* to come out at a much later time as part of his *Gesamtausgabe*, it was published as GA 89 in 2001. Because of F. W. von Herrmann's suggestion, Boss was able to see it published as a separate volume ahead of schedule in 1987.
31. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, 318/254.
32. Ibid., 318–19/254.
33. Kanti Chandra Pandey, *Abhinavagupta*, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Banara, 1963; *Western Aesthetics*, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Banara, after 1963 [*sic*].
34. Erna M. Hoch, "Bote zwischen Ost und West," *Daseinsanalyse*, vol. 2 (Basel: Karger, 1985), 1–36.
35. Erna M. Hoch, "Messenger between East and West," *Sources and Resources. A Western Psychiatrist's Search for Meaning in the Ancient Indian Scriptures* (Chur/Zürich: Rüegger, 1991), 249–93.
36. Cited in ibid., 251; small capitals in the original have been suppressed.
37. Ibid., 252–53.
38. Ibid., 285.
39. Ibid., 287.
40. Jarava Lal Mehta, *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 150–83.
41. Hoch, "Messenger between East and West," 285.
42. Ibid., 282.
43. "Für die Inder ist der Schlaf das höchste Leben," Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink, *Heraklit* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1970), 212.
44. In the opinion of Mehta, this remark is the only positive (and casual) reference to Indian thought. Mehta, "Heidegger and Vedānta: Reflections on a Questionable Theme," 24.
45. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, 224/178.
46. Ibid., emphasis original.
47. Ibid., 225/180, emphasis original.

48. Ibid., 226/181.
49. Elmar Weinmayr, "Aspekte des Übersetzens zwischen Heidegger und Japan," in *Destruktion und Übersetzung*, ed. Thomas Buchheim (Weinheim: VCH Verlagsgesellschaft, 1989), 177–96, 185.
50. Martin Heidegger and Hisamatsu Shinichi, "Die Kunst und das Denken. Protokoll eines Colloquiums am 18. Mai 1958," in Hartmut Buchner, *Japan und Heidegger. Gedenkschrift der Stadt Messkirch zum hundertsten Geburtstag Martin Heideggers* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1989), 211–15. This is the text to which I refer.
51. L. Alcopley (penname of Afred L. Copley), ed., *Listening to Heidegger and Hisamatsu* (Kyoto: Bokubi Press, 1963). Hannah Arendt, of whom L. Alcopley was a friend, contributed the English translation. Since her translation is quite free, I use my own translation.
52. Heidegger and Hisamatsu, "Die Kunst und das Denken," 211.
53. Ibid., 211.
54. Heidegger, "Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache," 113.
55. Tezuka Tomio, "An Hour with Heidegger," in Reinhard May, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on His Work*, trans. Graham Parkes (London: Routledge, 1996), 59–64 60–61; originally published in Japanese in 1955.
56. Heidegger and Hisamatsu, "Die Kunst und das Denken," 211.
57. Ibid., 212.
58. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1977), 143–212, 197.
59. Heidegger and Hisamatsu, "Die Kunst und das Denken," 214.
60. Chang Chung-yuan, "Reflections," in *Erinnerungen an Martin Heidegger*, ed. Günther Neske (Pfüllingen: Neske, 1977), 65–70, 68.
61. Heidegger and Hisamatsu, "Die Kunst und das Denken," 215.